

H. R. 423.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.

APRIL 17, 1871.

Read twice, referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and ordered to be printed.

Mr. STARKWEATHER, on leave, introduced the following bill:

A BILL

Providing for a commission to determine the claims for damages committed upon our commerce by the steamers Alabama, Shenandoah, Florida, Georgia, and other British cruisers.

Whereas, during the recent rebellion, certain vessels were fitted out and equipped in the ports of Great Britain to prey upon the commerce of the United States, contrary to the rules of international law, and after repeated remonstrances on the part of the Government of the United States to the government of Great Britain; and whereas, after these vessels were fitted out in violation of the laws of nations, they were received into various ports of Great Britain and were allowed to receive supplies at such ports, and to go out therefrom without molestation or hinderance; and whereas these vessels, known as the Alabama, the Shenandoah, the Florida, and the Georgia, did great damage to citizens of the United States by capturing and destroying various vessels and cargoes belonging to citizens of the United States; and whereas the government of Great Britain has not, up to this time,

consented to any acceptable means of determining and paying the amount of such damage; and whereas it is desirable that the evidence in regard to such damage be preserved, and that the amount thereof be determined and paid: Now, therefore,

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
 2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*
 3 That the President is authorized to appoint three commission-
 4 ers, for the purpose of ascertaining and determining the dam-
 5 age sustained by citizens of the United States, from and on
 6 account of the steamers Alabama, Shenandoah, Florida,
 7 Georgia, and other rebel cruisers.

1 SEC. 2. That the commissioners shall meet at Wash-
 2 ington, on or before the first day of June, eighteen hun-
 3 dred and seventy-two, but they may, if they think
 4 it advisable, afterward meet at New York, Boston, New
 5 Bedford, or New London, Connecticut. Before proceeding
 6 to any business, they shall make and subscribe a solemn oath
 7 that they will impartially and carefully examine and decide,
 8 without fear, favor, or affection to any of the claimants, upon
 9 all such claims as shall be laid before them, and such declara-
 10 tion shall be entered on the record of their proceedings. The
 11 commissioners shall then proceed to the investigation of all
 12 claims that may be presented to their notice by citizens of the
 13 United States, or their executors, administrators, or assigns, or by
 14 corporations organized by the laws of the United States, or of

15 any State, or by the assigns of such corporations, on account
16 of any and all damage which shall have been sustained by
17 citizens of the United States, or by corporations organized
18 under the laws of the United States, or of any State, from
19 and on account of the steamers Alabama, Shenandoah, Florida,
20 Georgia, and other rebel cruisers. The commissioners shall
21 investigate and decide upon such claims in such order and in
22 such manner as they may think proper. They shall prescribe
23 proper rules for the proof of the claims, shall hear counsel in
24 behalf of the claimant, and shall have authority to administer
25 oaths and to summon and examine witnesses. And every
26 claim shall be presented to the commissioners within six
27 months from the day of the first meeting, unless in any case
28 where reasons for delay shall be established to their
29 satisfaction.

1 SEC. 3. That the commissioners shall be bound to ex-
2 amine and decide upon every claim within one year from the
3 date of their first meeting. The decision upon each claim
4 shall be in writing, signed by the commissioners making the
5 same, and after such decision they shall give to each claimant
6 a certificate stating the amount so awarded on his claim, and
7 shall also make a report to the President, that he may submit
8 the same to Congress.